



San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Program Description Summary for Potential Site Owners and Managers February 2015

Program Description

The San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail (Water Trail) is a voluntary, planned network of access sites, or “trailheads,” designed to make it easier for people using non-motorized small boats (NMSBs) or boards (such as kayaks, sailboards, dragon boats, and stand up paddleboards) to safely enjoy the historic, scenic, cultural, and environmental richness of San Francisco Bay through single and multiple-day trips.

This nine-county program is being implemented under the leadership of the Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) in close collaboration with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the Division of Boating and Waterways of California State Parks and Recreation (Cal Boating), (together comprising the Project Management Team), plus an advisory committee representing a broad range of interests and expertise. The Water Trail program was created by legislation (2005, Hancock, AB 1296), and based upon the vision of the non-profit Bay Access, Inc. and a plan developed by BCDC¹.

The process of site designation has begun, with more than 100 potential trailheads being considered for inclusion into the network. Designed to benefit trail users, site owners, and the Bay environment alike, the Water Trail program has a website (www.sfbaywatertrail) and brochure with information about facilities at designated trailheads, safe and environmentally sound boating practices, and Bay wildlife and habitat. The Water Trail sign program includes an identification sign and education sign for designated sites. There is a limited amount of grant funding for improvements to designated trailheads.

Program Purpose

The competing pressures of increased NMSB use and increased development in the Bay Area point to the benefits that a planned and coordinated approach to NMSB access and use around the Bay could provide. Natural deterioration and a lack of funding to pay for repairs could lead to the loss of existing NMSB access locations over time. Without an overarching program, such as the Water Trail, to help find funding to replace or improve deteriorating sites, additional access sites may be lost.

The WT is expected to provide the following benefits or address the following needs:

- Create a coordinated set of NMSB access locations allowing for single point, multiple point, and multi-day excursions.
- Improve existing boat launch facilities and develop more overnight facilities, including camping, along the shoreline for NMSB users.

¹ The Enhanced Water Trail Plan was adopted by the Conservancy in March 2011 and may be reviewed at www.scc.ca.gov on the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail page. It is one of the principal guiding documents for the program and includes a preliminary list of sites to be considered for designation. Other sites will be considered as well, and not all sites in this plan will necessarily be designated. All sites must be open to the public, but may be privately owned.

- Promote placement of enhanced facilities and any new access locations in areas where they would provide the greatest recreational benefit and avoid or minimize significant adverse impacts to wildlife and habitat and/or agricultural operations.
- Plan for increased NMSB use associated with regional population growth and changes in population demographics.
- Promote safe boating practices for non-motorized small boat users.
- Reduce impacts to sensitive wildlife and habitat and other resources through education of boaters.
- Distribute and make available high quality information regarding NMSB access facilities through the development of educational and outreach materials, including a website, maps, brochures, and, in the future, a guidebook.
- Foster stewardship of the Bay and of trailhead facilities.
- Increase opportunities to recreate close to home and use public transportation rather than private vehicles (through the addition of boat storage facilities, for example).
- Streamline planning and implementation of high priority site enhancements through the programmatic Water Trail Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) developed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- Expand the connections with other regional trail systems (Bay Trail, Ridge Trail, Great California Delta Trail) to include the waters of the Bay.
- Reduce user conflicts among recreational users of launch sites through planning and facility design.
- Develop design guidelines for NMSB facilities that address the shoreline topography of San Francisco Bay and serve NMSB users with physical disabilities (the *Water Trail Accessibility Plan* is available for viewing or download on the [Water Trail page](http://www.scc.ca.gov) at www.scc.ca.gov).
- Provide funding, publicity, and, indirectly, possible economic growth to site owners/managers through a variety of business opportunities related to water-oriented recreation (e.g., boat storage, rental concessions, nearby restaurants and hotels).



Inclusion in the Water Trail: How to Join and What it Means to be Designated

Joining. Generally speaking, joining the Water Trail begins with interest from the site owner/manager and a governing body, such as a park commission, board of supervisors, and city council. Water Trail staff then work with the owner/manager to create a Site Description to capture the conditions of the site. This information is taken to the Project Management Team (PMT) and broad-based Advisory Committee (AC) at a public meeting where the PMT will make a decision about conditional designation. Sites with conditional designation are added to the designation map on

the Water Trail website. Once the conditions for designation have been met by the owner/manager, designation is complete. The following points provide more detail on this process:

- Conditional designation begins with a Site Description that includes location, site facilities (including information of interest to persons with disabilities), type of launch or landing provided, types of boats that usually use the site, a review of trailhead and nearby habitat and wildlife use under the existing Water Trail FEIR, current maintenance, and any needed improvements.
- All site designations include the condition to install a Water Trail sign (including logo and Water Trail website address), identifying the site as part of the Water Trail, and an education sign.
- There may be other types of conditions as well, depending on the site. For example, if Water Trail staff, the PMT, or AC find that designation of the site may result in significant environmental effects under CEQA, appropriate mitigation measures from the Water Trail FEIR (or other CEQA documents for the site in question) will be identified before the site is conditionally designated.
- Once the sign has been installed, and other conditions have been met, designation is complete and the site is included in the Water Trail network.

Designation. The Water Trail program has conditionally designated nine sites and fully designated one site so far. The following points regarding designation should help clarify what designation entails in the short and long-term.

- Most work related to site designation is carried out by Water Trail staff in order not to burden site owners or managers. Site owners will have the opportunity to review all information regarding the site prior to review by the PMT, AC, and before site information is posted on the website or included in other Water Trail media.
- The Water Trail map and the Water Trail website show the designation status of potential and designated sites.
- Copies of the Water Trail brochure are given to the site owner/manager.
- A Water Trail identification sign and education sign is provided to the site owner by the Water Trail program.
- Site owners will need to work with BCDC to get or amend a permit for the sign. Water Trail staff will assist site owners and offset permit costs.
- The site will become eligible for potential public funding grants from the program for Water Trail-related site improvements. The grant agreement will require that those improvements be maintained for a minimum of 20 years and remain available to the public, even if a site becomes “undesigned.”
- If there are substantial changes to the site over time, Water Trail staff would like to be informed. To be sure that Water Trail staff are aware of any significant changes that

may, for example, alter the availability of the site to the public, Water Trail staff will assess the site for any changes on an annual basis.

- A site owner may choose to leave the program at any time after designation, and the Water Trail program may “undesignate” a site if problems arise and cannot be resolved.
- The Water Trail program, when viewed in its entirety, must be accessible to qualified persons with disabilities in compliance with federal, state, and local requirements. Not every site will be or can be fully accessible. The *Water Trail Accessibility Plan*, adopted by the Coastal Conservancy in January 2015, is a resource for site owners and Water Trail program staff and may be found on the [Water Trail page](#) at www.scc.ca.gov. Water Trail staff will discuss site conditions and this *Plan* with site owners/managers at the time of completing a Site Description.

2015 Meetings

All Water Trail Implementation Meetings are open to the public. Agendas are posted at www.scc.ca.gov at least 10 days in advance of each meeting. In 2015, all meetings are expected to be at the Coastal Conservancy offices in Oakland, at 1330 Broadway, 11th floor conference room on the following dates: March 6, June 12, September 11, and December 9.

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San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail

Designated and Potential Water Trail Sites

